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ABSTRACT

In order to provide services in a manner that will keep the attention and confidence of their consumers, new efforts must be made and ways found to involve the public in the decisions and operations of individual public education institutions. Some ways in which public education may generate more involvement by individual consumers are examined here. Arguments behind moves to reform educational institutions are presented and preliminary findings of a study of private, non-religious schools are reported to indicate why middle class parents leave public school systems and remain in independent schools. The parameters of this choice are defined by differentiating between the actual processes for producing and allocating public services and ideal conditions of markets and bureaucracies. To understand the problem of more satisfactory delivery of educational services, three questions were asked of four non-religious, independent, nonpublic schools in the Washington D. C. area: 1) what caused parents to reach dissatisfaction with public schools? 2) how do these alternative schools satisfy them? 3) do these schools provide models to apply to public schools? Data revealed seven substantial reasons for leaving public schools and six factors of parent satisfaction with alternative schools.
(Author/KSM)

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# SEARCHING FOR MODELS OF COMMUNITY INFLUENCE IN SCHOOLS: A THEORETICAL MODEL AND A STUDY OF INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

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## I. CHOICE, RESPONSIVENESS AND THE PUBLIC SECTOR

Regardless of whether the Republicans or Democrats control the White House, the proportion of our national economy which is spent by the public sector has increased steadily over the past forth years. The public sector is now in excess of 30 percent of our gross national product (GNP), growing from less than 10 per cent of the GNP in 1929. By the year 2000, many estimates place the public sector's proportion of the economy at nearly 50 percent. The reasons for this increase are complex, but seem to be rooted in our increasingly inter-dependent urban and technological society. There are fewer

and fewer decisions which can be left completely to private discretion, without some rather substantial side-effects within the society.

As this trend continues, new questions and challenges in the delivery of public services must be faced. Will the public sector be able to satisfy public demands for goods and services, delivered in a manner that is responsive to individual needs and preferences. Too often, large bureaucracies (whether public or private) are unresponsive and offer few choices. The public consumer is frequently required to accept the services of a particular office or supplier. The only way to express dissatisfaction with a specific service is through a relatively cumbersome and often ineffective system of registering a complaint with elected officials who may not have the formal power to influence the agency in question.[1]

The delivery of educational services is one of the oldest and most vital public services. In fact, recent court decisions have declared equal oportunity to education to be a fundamental right protected by the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.[2] But, the delivery of educational services is facing a crisis of unprecedented proportions,

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[1] See Robert L. Bish, The Public Economy of Metropolitan Areas (Chicago: Markham Publishers, 1971); Robert L. Bish and Robert Warren, "Scale and Monopoly Problems in Urban Government Services," Urban Affairs Quarterly, Vol. 8 (September, 1972), pp. 97-122; Jesse Burkhead and Jerry Miner, Public Expenditure (Chicago: Aldine.Atherton, Inc., 1971); Albert O. Hirschman, Exit, Voice and Loyalty (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970).

especially in our nation's largest cities where, almost without exception, confidence in the quality of public education is so low that most families who can afford it flee to suburban schools or enroll their children in private schools.

This paper argues that in order to provide services in a manner that will keep the attention and confidence of their consumers, new efforts must be made to find ways to involve the public in the decisions and operations of individual public institutions. We will examine some of the ways in which public education may and should be reformed to allow more involvement by individual consumer. First, Mr. Porter will briefly present some of the economic and administrative arguements behind moves to reform educational institutions. Second, Ms. Porter will report the preliminary findings of a study she is conducting of private, non-religious schools. In that study she is looking for reasons why middle class parents leave public school systems and why they remain in independent schools after their initial decision was made.

## II. DEFINING THE SETTING AND PARAMETERS FOR CHOICE

Two of the great intellectual achievements of the past two hundred years within the Western world may well be the rationalization of markets and bureaucracies. Unfortunately for those involved in the public sector, our current under-

standing of these two social phenomena limits their most effective use to the allocation of durable goods in a private marketmarket economy. Neither markets or bureaucracies work well in the allocation of intangible products or products which do not have a well understood production function. Most of what is done in the public sector is either a service or does not have a known production function. As a general rule, only in the case of natural monopolies are durable goods with well understood production functions undertaken in the public sector. Public utilities are good examples of natural monopolies. The failure of the theories of the market and bureaucracy to deal with most public sector activities leaves and important gap in our understanding of the distribution of resources in our society, particularly as the public sector and service components of the private sector are increasing proportionately.

The underlying values of the market and bureaucracy are widely held in the United States. A competitive market is held to be desirable because it determines what is to be produced in a democratic and decentralized manner, or through "consumer sovereignty." Consumer, by bidding for the goods and services they desire, determine how much of any item will be produced. If there is no market for an item, production ceases; if there is heavy demand, production increases. Bureaucracies fit into a market economy by allowing groups to more

efficiently produce the good or service demanded by consumers. Through divisions of labor, specialization, orderly authority relationships and the development of careers, a bureaucracy is able to accomplish efficiently the objectives set for it. Thus, Max Weber argued, the bureaucratic form of social organization will drive out the less efficient organizations.

But, both the market and bureaucracies require tasks which can be effectively evaluated by a consumer and/or divided neatly into a series of sub-tasks. As mentioned above, most of the activity in the public secotr does not meet those requirements. Even so, the basic values underlying markets and bureaucracies should not be discarded just because the ideal models do not fit comfortably in the public sector. The efficient production of goods and services by the public sector and their allocation through a democratic and decentralized (i.e. consumer senstive) system are values not generally open to controversy.

In the balance of this section, we will specify some of the differences between the actual processes for producing and allocating public services, and how these differ from the ideal conditions of markets and bureaucracies. Then we will attempt to outline some reforms which will take the differences between ideal and real into account, and yet still allow for the promotion of the values of efficiency, democracy

and decentralization.

A. MARKETS AND ALLOCATIONS IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

Differences between the allocation of resources in markets and the public sector are rooted in the basic transaction, when goods are transferred. Kenneth Boulding and the Pfaffs, in their pioneering work on the "grants economy,"[3] have emphasized that most transactions in the public sector take the form of transfers or grants, and are not reciprocal exchanges of equal values between a buyer and a seller. The taxpyer pays into a general fund, with no immediate exchange of publically produced goods and services forhis use. The money in the general fund is then allocated to producers of public goods and services, with no direct connection between how much an individual pays in and how many goods and services he receives. This lack of reciprocity in the transaction is necessary, given the "nonexclusive" character of most public goods,[4] but has a substantial effect on how the basic values underlying the market are able to be fulfilled in the public sector.

For instance, if the market values of decentralization and democratic choice (through prices) are to be fulfilled, individuals and families must be aware of what is being produced,

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[3]See Martin and Anita Pfaff, The Grants Economy (Belmont, Calif., Wadsworth Publ., forthcoming.

[4]Richard A. Musgrave, The Theory of Public Finance (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1959), pp. 9-12.

they must have some rough idea of the good's quality, and be able to choose among alternative products or producers. In the private market, the consumer's attention and interest are automatically and more easily focused on the good or service being purchased. Money is given directly for the specific service or good in a series of discreet transactions as a person's income is spent. A judgment can be made about the quality and quantity of each good he desires. In the public sector, however, tax funds are taken in a lump sum and distributed trhough appropriations processes in which the average citizen has a very small role. Once the money enters the general fund, the consumer of public services has no automatic or direct way (as in a market system) to keep track of how the funds are spent. Only through the voting process and various "lobbying" activities can the public express its satisfaction with the quality or quantity of a public service. These mechanisms are imperfect and imprecise indicators of preferences for specific public goods. Voting and lobbying are mechanisms which seem better suited for revealing public preferences on broad policy questions, or general orientations toward the management of a government jurisdiction.

In short, the buyer (the taxpayer) and the seller (the provider of the service) are separated; they do not come together automatically with each transaction as they often do

in the private sector. Ignorance and apathy on the part of the consumer are the inevitably results of such a mechanism; insensitivity and indifference on the part of the providers of public services are encouraged. These two results may be exascerbated as the size of our public institutions increases; relationships become more impersonal and remote. In this setting the quality of services is frequently judged to be unacceptable by consumers, but they have no effective way to express their dissatisfaction.

Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the differences between allocations through a competitive market and through a government. Figure 1 shows the direct relationship between the consumer and producer in a market. The consumer (or his agent) is personally involved in each transaction. If he is not satisfied, he can vary the quantity of the good or service purchased, seek alternative producers or products, and evaluate on a continuing basis the quality of the good or service. All of this is done as a normal part of each transaction. The consumer is knowledgeable about what is being produced; the producer is aware of the preferences of his customers.

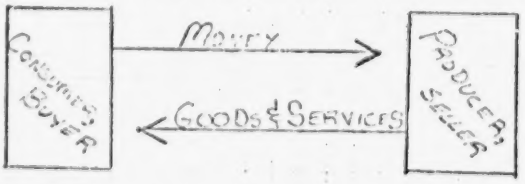


FIGURE 1

Figure 2 shows the general pattern of allocations in the public sector. For the sake of the figure's application

to schools, the reader may want to conceive of the "consumer, buyer" as a family with children in school, the "producer, seller" as an individual school building, and the general revenue and expenditure units as the general school district adminsitration. In our judgment, a very important difference for the market allocation process is the "detour" the money takes on its way to the producer. The taxes are levied and paid into a general fund. In that there is no direct relationship between what is paid into the government and the goods or services received, the rational thing for a taxpayer to do at this point is to resist any attempts at raising his taxes, and to try to shift the tax burden to others. As indicated on the figure, groups of taxpayer lobbies have specialized to practice this strategy. The interest groups connected to the expenditure side of the process reationally use a strategy which is the opposite of that adopted by the taxpaying groups. Since they are not paying the bills, it is rational to push for all the funds they can justify. Most legislatures reflect this division between tax policy and expenditure policy by having separate committees on ways and means (taxation) and appropriations (expenditures).

The producer looks to the expenditure side of the allocation process, and submits its budget justifications to them. This is in contrast to the competitive market situation, where

the producer looks to its consumers as its primary source of funds. If a producer in the public sector wants to increase the resources it has, it looks to its supporters on the expenditure side. Consumers may be rallied into the fold, but only to influence the governmental units which contol the expenditures.

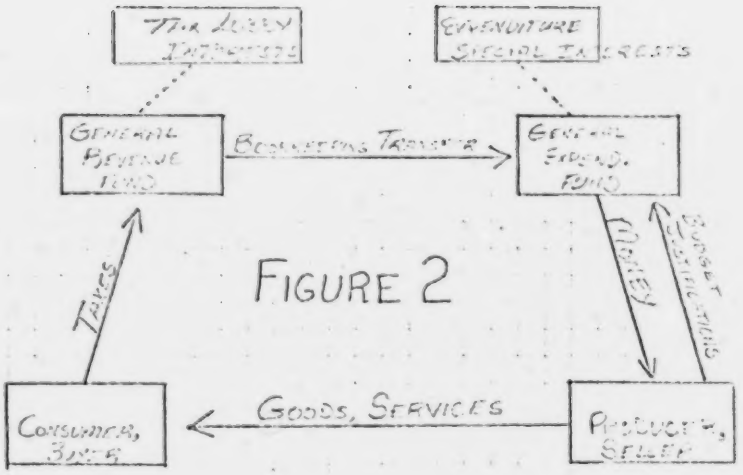


FIGURE 2

Consumers, on the other hand, have a more indirect method of expressing their preferences if they are dissatisfied with the quantity or quality of the service. In that consumers do not control the funds going to the producers, they are unable to influence the manner in which goods or services are delivered through the simple device of increasing or decreasing their purchases. They must work, through votes and lobbying efforts, to influence the appropriations process. In this effort, consumers must compete for the attention of executive and legislative appropriators with fulltime and often in-house representatives of the institutions they are

trying to influence. Usually, this process works fairly well when customers are clamoring for higher expenditures, as both consumers and producers are working together to influence the appropriations process. However, when consumers would like a cutback or seek some substantial redirection of the institution, the fulltime attention and staying power of public producers is usually too much for consumer groups that are not large and highly organizaed. Thus, one of the requirements for an economically decectralized and democratic system is not present. An individual consumer cannot vary the quantity and quality he receives, and he may not even be in a position to choose another producer.

The second major difference is that he will not have the information to make decisions about what is being produced. In contrast to Figure 1, Figure 2 shows that there is a one-way relationship between the producer and the buyer. Any cues that the consumer can give the producer in determining how the local and/or private goods aspects[5] of the service should be adjusted to meet the preferences of the direct consumer must be routed through a political system. This system is not an effective mechanism for transmitting inormation on a particular service from consumer to producer, or from producer to consumer. It works best in evaluating broad and

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[5]We will discuss the distinction between local and national, and public and private aspects of public goods below.

general policies. Thus, the consumer is relatively powerless as he relates to the producer. He has little information and few choices.

In the schools, for instance, he is required to send his children to a particular school. His only choice may be in bringing pressure to have his child taught by a particular teacher. In such a situation, he has little incentive to learn about the education process. He has little power to change the situation, so why learn anything about it. Also, the principal has few incentives to inform the parent of what is being done in the school. From the principal's viewpoint, the more the patron knows, the more trouble he can cause. "Let sleeping dogs lie." Funds come from the central level and are only incidently tied to performance criteria. It has been nearly impossible to devise a set of performance criteria which reflect the subtleties and complexities of an activity such as education. Therefore, in those aspects of public services where personal discretion can be usefully and meaningfully excercised, the structure of the allocation process systematiclly encourages ignorance on the part of the consumer and a lack of communication on the part of the producer.

B. BUREAUCRACY AND GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE

A bureaucracy operates most efficiently in situations where objectives are fairly clear, standards are known, the processes of production are known, and the task can be subdivided into relatively neat categories.. Authority relationships should be stable and related to the performance of the task, with each level having power commensurate with its responsibilities. As is the case for the conditions for the operation of a competitive market, these conditions are rarely satisfied. Public organizations satisfy few of them.

In the public sector, the mechanisms for setting goals andobjectives are slow and imprecise. Conflict and disagreement about what is to be done are fairly frequent. Standards of evaluation are numerous and qualitative in character. There are few comprehensive, aggregative measures of success and none that can compare with the measure of profitability in the private sector. Services predominate in the public sector. The processes of production (the "production function") for services are less understood than in the production of durable goods, making tests for technical efficiency difficult. Further, with poorly understood production functions and labor intensive, custom technologies, neat sub-divisions of objectives become improbable.

Authority relationships within public organizations are even further from the ideal bureaucratic type. Our federal system of government divides and fragments authority so that few governmental jurisdictions have sufficient resources and/or authority to accomplish their objectives, even if they could unambiguously decide what should be done. Local governments are probably the worst in this respect. Cities blame the schools and the schools the cities for not dealing with some important problem which impinges on their individual domains. Both complain about not having sufficient financial resources to accomplish the duties the State has assigned them.

The list of examples could easily be expanded. But the point is already clear. The gap between the conditions necessary for the operation of an efficient bureaucracy and the situation in the public sector is wide. Good will and Good intentions alone are not sufficient to close the gap. The structure of the allocation process and the tasks performed present special problems for the public sector. If the basic market and bureaucratic values of decentralized, democratic and efficient decision-making are to be realized, we must reform our public institutions in a way which takes into account some of the objective constraints inherent in the public sector.

C. MOVING TOWARD CONSUMER SENSITIVE GOVERNMENTS

As can easily be seen from the study of private schools reported in the second half of this paper, many parents want more choices and more control in the education of their children. Further, the recent report by the research team headed by Christopher Jencks[6] suggests to us that parent contributions to the schooling process may improve the quality of education.

Several proposals have been advanced by others which will allow parents and students a more substantial role in determining what the process and substance of their education will be. Charles S. Benson has written an excellent analysis of the more important of these proposals.[7] His evaluation suggests that some version of the "family power equalizing" proposal of Coons, Clune and Sugarman would satisfy many of the conditions for the democratic, decentralized and effective delivery of school services.[8] We would supplement Benson's analysis of decentralization plans, vouchers and family power equalizing by emphasizing one element not sufficiently covered in any of them.

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[6]Christopher Jencks et. al., Inequality (New York: Basic Books, 1972).

[7]Charles S. Benson, "Economic Analysis of Institutional Alternatives for Providing Education," in Economic Factors Affecting the Financing of Education, R.L. Johns, et.al., eds. (Gainesville, Fla.: National Educational Finance Project, 1970).

[8]John E. Coons, William H. Clune, III, and Stephen D. Sugarman, Private Wealth and Public Education (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970).

No function performed by a government is totally a public good (in the strict economic definition[9]) and no function should be performed exclusively by one level of government or another.[10] Rather, aspects of functions are public, and aspects are private; aspects of the functions should be performed at the local levels, aspects at the state levels, and aspects at the federal level. For example, in schooling there are aspects of public education which would have grave consequences for the larger society if they were not compulsory and generally provided. However, there are aspects (such as the provision of certain enrichment programs) which are essentially private consumption. The exclusion of these private aspects would have a much smaller impact on the society as a whole.

Further, there are aspects of schooling which are best performed at the national level. Desegregation policy, for instance, must be mandated from the federal level to be effective. On the other hand, the coordination of teaching techniques, school services and curriculum for the individual student is best handled at the level of the school building.[11]

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[9]Musgrave, Public Finance, chaps. 1 and 3.

[10]Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, Performance of Urban Functions (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1963).

[11]See David C. Porter and Eugene A. Olsen, "Toward a More Rational Model for Centralization and Decentralization of Government," (a paper to be presented at the 1973 meetings of the American Society for Public Administration) for a more detailed analysis of the manner in which the public and private or national and local aspects of public functions can be divided.

We suggest that careful attention should be given to discriminating among the various aspects of schooling functions. Choices on the "public goods aspects" of functions which are essentially national or statewide in their impact would not be turned over to parents and students for private decision. These aspects -- such as policies on racial discrimination, equal educational opportunity and fair employment practices -- comprise the parameters within which parents and students can choose among those aspects which are (1) primarily private goods or (2) local in their consequences or administrative requirements. A careful setting of the parameters of consumer choice, combined with the mechanisms suggested in the family power equalizing proposal, will do much to move our governmental institutions toward structures which will be consumer sensitive in a manner which is socially responsible.

The next section will report the findings of a study of private schools. We think the manner in which parents are choosing and participating in these independent schools may provide some clues for establishing consumer sensitive institutions of public education.

## III. THE SEARCH FOR MORE SATISFACTORY SCHOOLS

At great additional cost to themselves, a number of clients (parents) have abandoned their public schools in Washington, D.C., and the surrounding suburbs. Confidence in the capability of public school professionals to deliver quality education is often so low, especially in the nation's largest cities, that many families that are financially able, turn to suburban or private schools. Some of the most promising sources of information about the perceived weaknesses or deficiencies of both urban and suburban public schools may be the private schools to which former clients have resorted. Until recently very little was known about nonpublic schools, and serious study has just begun with Otto F. Kraushaar's American Nonpublic Schools.[12]

The present study aims to increase our understanding of a particular type of nonpublic school, the non-religious (independent) school. Schools were selected which had a high degree of parent participation at several levels as an important norm, reflected in practice as well as policy. It was hoped that parent-active schools would enhance the client "choice" factor in the study. This paper reports an exploratory examination of four such schools in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area.

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[12]Otto F. Kraushaar, American Nonpublic Schools (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972).

Three questions which best begin to "get at" the problem of more satisfactory delivery of educational services are: 1) What caused parents to reach the threshold of dissatisfaction with their public schools, resulting in their decision to leave those schools? 2) How do these four alternative schools satisfy their patrons? and 3) Do these alternative schools provide effective organizational models which may be applied to the public schools? These questions were the guidelines for the exploratory study.

## IV. FOUR PARENT-ACTIVE INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

The four schools studied are coeducational, non-profit, day schools serving families living in the District of Columbia and the surrounding suburbs. Three of the schools -- which will be called Bede School, The Woodlands, and Hillside School -- are located in the suburbs, but attract a substantial number of students whose families live in Washington. In one case Washington families make up about 50% of the studentbody. The school located in Washington, The Montessori School, draws nearly 15% of its 100 students from the suburbs.

The Montessori School, the only specialty school, is the only one dedicated to a particular and well-defined teaching method. The three other schools attach themselves to no

particular educational method or philosophy, although in the past they have been considered "progressive" schools. They describe themselves as flexible, and to some degree ungraded classes and/or open-classroom techniques are used. One school mainly provides traditional classroom units for parents who are disenchanted with the widespread adoption of open-classrooms in the local public schools.

The schools are non-religious schools and are referred to by Kraushaar as independent schools. Each school is an autonomous system distinct from other school organizations.

The single most important commonality among the four schools is that the parents of the children do more than provide children and tuition. The parents are a significant part of the school function. Because these schools are governed by elected policy-making boards composed of parents with children currently enrolled, they are different from traditional and sometimes prestigious private schools which are controlled by self-perpetuating boards of trustees who are frequently wealthy or notable figures in the community, often without children enrolled in the school. The latter schools are considered relatively "parent proof."

The administration of the independent schools in this study is simple in structure, with only two or three people

working at it full time. To carry out policy, a professional administrator or head, who usually has one main secretarial assistant, directs the school for the parents and is directly responsible to the parents for curriculum and the teaching staff. The system relies heavily on the competence or perceived effectiveness of the school head or director.

In comparison with most public schools in the area, these four independent schools are small schools, ranging from 100 students up to age six at the relatively new Montessori School to from 200 to 300 (K-8th grade) at the three other schools.

Each school has many more student applicants than vacancies each year. Applications for faculty positions also run very high, far exceeding the number of openings. In three of the four schools, further expansion is either in process or under serious discussion.

The schools rely greatly on the assistance of parents in the maintenance of the schools and to some degree in the classroom activities as well. During admissions procedures, prospective parents who appear reluctant to work at the school during initial interviews, are likely to be screened out by parent and staff committees even though their children may qualify for admission. "Doing one's share of the work at the

school" is a recurrent theme and is indicative of parent participation as a group norm. The use of parents in the classrooms, at the invitation of the teachers individually, varies and takes different forms. In no school, however, are parents completely restricted to maintenance duties, although the Montessori School uses only a few parents for whom the school has arranged specific training in classroom assistance. Parent participation at the schools is advocated for one or more of the following reasons: a) to minimize maintenance costs and consequently keep tuition lower than it otherwise would be, b) to use parents as valuable sources of information (as professionals in their fields, for example) and as helpful contacts for enrichment of classroom presentations and for facilitation of special off-campus experiences, and c) to demonstrate to the children that their parents are interested in them and that parents value education. The parent is an integral part of the school and is seen as a major personal supporter and resource. Three of the four independent schools call themselves cooperatives or parent co-ops. One school includes the faculty and all employees as equal members in the co-op.

The parents are typically articulate, demanding, and well-informed about local public schools as well as about the

independent schools they patronize. They may be generally described as middle and upper-middle class; professionals (medical doctors, attorneys, and teachers), businessmen and bureaucrats; and they are usually products of public schools themselves. Most parents have taken a child out of the public schools for various reasons, although they still believe in patronizing public schools and seriously assert their preference for public education when the public schools can give them the quality service they seek for their children. They value education and a pleasant, stimulating environment for children. Several have been deeply involved in public school parent groups and several continue to do volunteer work in the public schools they formerly patronized. Collectively, the parents believe in a degree of racial and economic integration and they support scholarship efforts within their nonpublic schools aimed at providing heterogeneity among the students. It is not unusual to discover that a parent or former parent is employed by the school as a teacher, a secretary, or as in three of the four schools, as director or head of the school.

The students are described by school heads as average to bright academically. Although some students are considered somewhat slow academically, the schools do not believe them-

selves equipped with staff or facilities to work with children in need of serious remedial work, handicapped children or delinquents. Very bright or advanced children fit into the fairly flexible and often ungraded curriculum quite comfortably. Since each of the schools relies heavily on a system of self-discipline or self-direction as the norm among students, children who become major discipline problems are asked to leave the school, a fairly drastic and infrequent event. The schools, as a rule, do not admit students they believe will have difficulty adjusting to the norms. The schools tend to take few risks at admission time.

Although somewhat pressed for resources, the schools do not claim to have severe financial problems. Morale is generally good in spite of the ever present problems of needs for equipment, space, and higher teacher salaries.

Turnover of teachers is modest and mostly attributed to reasons unrelated to dissatisfaction. Student turnover is minimal beyond normal turnover related to family moves, financial limitations in the family, and "graduation."

In the wide range of private school tuition in the area, these independent schools are low-middle to middle. The lowest tuition for the first grade in 1971 was $730; the highest, $1,250. The lowest tuition for the 8th grade was $850; the highest, $1,475.

The three schools located in the suburbs are housed in modest but distinctive buildings, away from the main road, with considerable acreage of hills and wooded areas. The Montessori School in Washington is housed in an old, rented church, a typical place for private schools in the city. At all suburban schools the entire school is in one visible location with the director's office easily accessible to students, teachers, and parents.

## V. STUDY DESIGN AND DATA GATHERING

The exploratory study which is briefly reported here, took place between October and December of 1972. Because of the diversity among the over 200 private schools in the Washington, D.C. area, and because of the necessity of imposing limits on the study, reputable schools, known among area educators interviewed early in the study as the most open to parents, their influence and assistance, were selected. Alternative schools (nonpublic schools) where discontented former public school patrons were presently cooperating with professional educators in decision-making and management in general, seemed to be a plausible place to begin learning about maximization of client satisfaction with educational services.

Reputable, but not highly prestigious or "society," schools were selected whose annual tuition was roughly midway between the lowest, $400 (charged by a parochial school), and the highest, $2,550. This range excluded the three schools whose 1972 tuition was between $3,000 and $4,000, far above the rest.

Three schools offer kindergarten through eighth grade but the inner city Montessori cooperative school at present enrolls only children 2½ through age six. It is planning to add elementary grades beginning next year. Only one school invited to participate in the study declined.

Although considerable attention was given to such documents as organizational bulletins, newsletter, policy statements, and histories, the primary source of data on which the report relies is elite, open-ended interviews with school directors, teachers, and especially with parents of students. Usually names of parents and teachers with diverse views, with whom the researcher would attempt to secure personal interviews, were received from the school director during an initial interview at the school. Frequently names of parents which were suggested by the first parents interviewed were contacted. Interviews were as short as one hour and as long as two hours. Long hand notes were taken during

the interview and transcribed into full reports within hours of completion. Interviews were never scheduled back-to-back.

School heads were interviewed at the school, at which time the researcher was usually led through the school buildings and classrooms and introduced to parents and faculty. Interviews with parents were most often conducted at the parent's home and interviews with teachers and directors always took place at school. Twenty-eight interviews were made in this phase of the study. Interviews from one school were completed usually within a two week period, and interviews at one school were completed before a second school was begun.

Although the researcher's notes include descriptions of the campus and of interpersonal interaction observed while visiting the schools, notes recording each interview provide the primary data. The open-ended interviews ideally contained few specific questions and instead were designed to follow the thinking and experience of the particular interviewee. Interviewees were only asked 1) to decride how they arrived at the decision to leave the public schools, 2) how they chose their nonpublic school, and 3) to describe the strengths and weaknesses of both the public schools available to them and the independent school which they now patronize. Teachers described their preference for working at the independent school, and

if they were presently or had previously been parents at the school, they described their dual roles.

The data will be presented in a two part framework. Reasons for parents leaving the public schools and consequently seeking an independent school will be reported in Part VI. Part VII describes the reasons for parent satisfaction with the independent school after having been a part of it over a period of time.

## VI. PARENTAL REASONS FOR INITIALLY PATRONIZING INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

Sitting on short school chairs at Hillside School in a room bordered with various projects, including a large, old sawdust-filled chest serving as a homemade mouse colony, Rhonda Timmons, a teacher, described her reactions to her son's public school experiences, which led to his enrollment in Hillside School.

> The standardized or canned material from the district or state or from the workbook seems to be such a great waste for some children. In Jeff's class, every child had to do so many pages of a particular exercise even if he had already really learned it before.... My child, while in public school, spent half his day on requirements which often seemed of little real value. And much of his time was spent just waiting for the others to finish or for the next exercise to begin.

Another parent, Blanche Amory, enrolled two young childen at The Woodlands because both children were known to have quite poor physical coordination and their writing was particularly poor. She believed that because of the considerable pressure and academic demands in her neighborhood public schools, her children would not receive the gentle, personal attention and peer tolerance she believed necessary while the children grew and developed. The Woodlands provided patient and concerned teachers who gave extra assistance to the children socially and academically.

Both the Timmons and the Amory families enrolled their children in independent schools because they believed the public schools could not satisfactorily meet the needs of their children. In the case of Rhonda Timmons, she judged the public school as not academically challenging enough for her hcild. And Blanche Amory thought public schools in her neighborhood would be too impersonal and academically threatening for her poorly coordinated children.

The reasons given by parents in this study for initially entering their children in an alternative school are reviewed here and it must be pointed out that most decisions involved a combination of the following reasons:

A. UNAVAILABILITY OF CERTAIN SERVICES IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

At least part of the motivation for over half of the parents transferring to or choosing an independent school in the first place was the unavailability or inadequacy of special educational services within the public schools, services which the parents considered important or essential to the children's development. Those special educational services included:

1) adequate opportunity and challenge for very bright children who were perceived as being held back by the pace or level of their public school classes;
2) adequate semi-remedial help for students described as slow, academically weak, or behind their peers in coordination or maturity;
3) personal and extra encouragement by teachers extended to capable underachievers who needed an environment where excellence, instead of "getting by with C's and D's" is expected and facilitated;
4) special testing, evaluation, and counseling for placement of students who were having unexplainable difficulty with schoolwork; and
5) the provision of nursery, pre-school, or kindergarten services which were not provided by the state at the time.

B. ABSENCE OF CONFIDENCE AND PRIDE IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

> It greatly concerned me that there was so little interest in the school, no animals, no art anyplace. The manner around the place was very tedious and routine and even though the faculty was mixed in race, age, and sex, it was "cut from the same cloth" in that the people were not very interesting people. They were routine and tedious in their approach. There was little stimulation or excitement about school in them. They simply went about their jobs very blandly. The building itself was promising.....--Joan Moon of Hillside School, a former client of a middle class public school in the North West part of Washington

> I still feel like a stranger when I enter the building. The corridors are typically empty and there is little movement around the school. It could be mistaken for a very plain business office building. There is either nothing on the walls to indicate that it is a place where young children spend a great deal of time and energy, or there are a few little nearly identical letters all saying the same thing, "We went to the zoo..." or showing very similar drawings, pinned up on some bulletin board. But at The Woodlands (nonpublic school) people are moving about and most of them know each other's first names. And all over the walls are brilliant displays of the children's art or projects, distinct and dominant visually. --Sarah Abrams, a former public school client who still does weekly volunteer work at the public school where she no longer sends her children, in a middle and upper-middle class Washington neighborhood

Approximately one fourth of the parents indicated that a factor in their decision to seek out a private school was that although the public school had been tolerable in some respects (their child was acquiring at least basic reading, writing, and number skills), they believed it was their

parental obligation to secure a better than tolerable educational environment for their child. They wanted a school in which they had more confidence and in which they could take more pride.

C. THE INNER CITY PUBLIC SCHOOL AS A HOSTILE PLACE

> Soon after we moved into the townhouse, Jack (elementary school age) was told by a new found black friend, 'You don't want to go to this school (public). There's one white kid there and they beat up on him all the time.'
> --Mary Stypinski of the Montessori School, a resident in the Capitol Hill area of Washington

Parents in the District of Columbia frequently live in neighborhoods where most public schools are considered by both black and white middle class families (the outsiders) as unthinkable places to send their children because the all-black, poor schools are considered unsafe and educationally inferior. Although some parents say they would prefer to patronize public schools if a more heterogeneous student-body existed (and several city parents actively work toward improvement of public schools around them), for these parents the present schools are out-of-the-question. About one fourth of the parents interviewed were in this situation.

D. THE BUREAUCRACY OF PROFESSIONAL EDUCATORS AS IMPENATRABLE

Nearly one fourth of the parents described being personally alienated by the professionals or their public school

bureaucracy. Several parents told involved stories of frustrated dealings with principals and administrators from the "downtown offices," typically concerning the parents' activities to encourage their neighborhood school to upgrade or improve general conditions. These parents left believing their public schools had shut them out of any participation in their children's schools. The schools had either ignored or resisted parents' attempts to assist the schools, especially in the District of Columbia where the school system is at present in general disrepute.

E. A SPECIAL METHOD IS PREFERRED

One third of the interviewees, all parents at The Montessori School, selected the school partly because they specifically wanted the Montessori method, a specific and well-defined pedagogical method, for their children. This particular Montessori school, a cooperative, drew parents because it was nearest their inner city residence but also because it had earned a positive reputation as a "pure" Montessori school.

F. THE ATTRACTION OF A HIGHLY RECOMMENDED NONPUBLIC SCHOOL

The primary reason for nearly one fourth of the parents enrolling a child in an independent school was the school's good reputation among highly satisfied parents combined with

a positive impression gained during the initial contact with the school. For only one parent, however, was the attraction of the school the sole reason for initially patronizing it. For all other parents interviewed, displeasure with or the unavailability of a special educational service within the public schools were major factors in choosing a nonpublic school.

G. BUSING AND PEACEFUL INTEGRATION

One parent left the fairly reputable public schools in his suburban neighborhood in order to avoid the desegregation by busing which he had seen as inevitable since Judge Robert R. Merhige, Jr.'s 1970 order that Richmond, Virginia's suburban schools assist in the desegregation of the Richmond area schools. Maintaining that the courts were taking control of the public schools out of the hands of the parents whose children had been attending them, he was determined to "get into a good private school ahead of the stampede" which would result as white suburban parents were faced with busing to achieve integration. "We have control, as much as anyone could possibly have at this (independent) school. They can't bus our kids away from us yet." Clearly the threats of court control of the schools and racial integration, not busing, were the objection to public schools, because this parent personally transported his five children a considerable

distance out of his neighborhood to the independent school.

On the other hand, most parents described their preference to have their children in integrated schools and they claimed that in the suburbs, often the only integrated schools or peacefully integrated schools, were the nonpubiic schools.

Having briefly reviewed the reasons parents give for having switched to the nonpublic schools, Part VII describes the reasons for parents remaining in their independent schools.

## VII. CLIENT (PARENT) SATISFACTION WITH INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

Each parent interviewed believed that his independent school was providing educational services that were at least to some degree superior to parallel services in the public school from which they had withdrawn. Beyond satisfaction with particular educational services, every parent described additional, unanticipated benefits associated with being part of the small independent school.

As parents described their satisfaction with the school they had chosen, the dominant theses which emerge are: a) the value of a small school as a "community;" b) the admirable performance of teachers and the director; c) the value of significant parent involvement; d) the belief that parents can exercise power in the decision-making process; e) the pride and excitement among children and parents associated with "school;"

and f) the costs to parents for patronizing an independent school.

A. A SENSE OF "COMMUNITY": EVERYBODY KNOWS EVERYBODY

> There's a closeness there (Hillside School), with all the strengths and weaknesses that come from being a closely knit group. A "caring" exists among the people. Small size probably has a lot to do with it.... If a family gets into trouble, someone in the group will help out. The staff and parents really do support each other where they possibly can. It almost takes the place of a church group, with the closeness and "caring" in the community. Like a big family. Of course, there are conflicts with the closeness too....Maybe the school helps us reconstruct something we sort of lost when most of us left small towns and familiar groups where everybody knew everybody. --Francis Andrews, Hillside School parent

> Very important, I as a parent am told about little problems soon while they are still little problems. On the other hand at the public school it was four months before I found out that my kid cried every day. No one ever let me know.... At Woodlands (nonpublic school) there's a kind of partnership in that smaller school and everybody cares about everybody else. Even the older kids get the idea at Woodlands that they should work with the younger children and they really help them. -- Sarah Abram, Woodlands School parent

The dominant theme emerging from the interviews was the value of the sense of "community" or social group identity which parents discovered within the small independent school group. This community is described in the words of parents as a place where everybody knows everybody, often on a first name basis, and a place where a parent can find out what's going on. People with a common commitment to the general idea of "good education" for their children have chosen

that particular school. Parents describe a kind of partnership between the parents and the school (professional educators) which works to see that the children succeed. Significant personal relationships can develop and people are quite responsible and sensitive to each other. It was emphasized that teachers and other school personnel are concerned about children as individuals.

Parents are pleased that there is no large, impersonal bureaucracy "downtown" through which decisions must creep. Instead, the school is described as "human sized," manageable, and capable of making changes relatively swiftly and painlessly. And most important the director and the teachers are easily accessible and will listen to the concerns of parents.

Criticism and internal conflicts over policy matters are not uncommon and are sometimes intense within the group, as are cooperation and enjoyment. Once a vote is taken on a policy and a decision is reached, generally the air is cleared, until the next controversy. The ground rules or the internal political process permits hard bargaining and heated debate among the typically articulate and opinionated participants. At the interperpersonal level, conflict that dones not involve the groups as a whole, but several individuals, often takes place with direct and frank confrontation (perhaps between a parent and teacher or the director) but efforts

are made to maintain reasonable civility and dialogue. In such an open system where everyone feels free to have "their say," the director, who literally links the community together, functions as chief peacemaker.

The whole child "counts" at the school and variations in his behavior are noticed and often communicated back and forth between parents and school (teachers and director) during regular and informal meetings. Telephone calls between teachers and parents are a common method of keeping in touch on minor matters. Social exchanges and work parties, particularly the fall get-acquainted party for the adults held in a parent's home, serve to facilitate comfortable informal relationships between parents and teachers.

Most conspicuous in the interviews are the frequent references to "we" and "our" school, indicating parental identity with the school community.

B. TEACHERS AND "QUALITY EDUCATION"

> The excellent teachers make the difference. They are professionals. They are proud of their work. They are the kind of people who even after they leave school, still think about their work and plan how it can be made better. We get the very best teachers. We do it because it's a lot nicer to teach here.... Here teachers just teach. Activities and paper work are mostly handled by parents. -- Martin Springman, Bede School parent

> ...the very best that Hillside has to offer is that the children meet such interesting people as faculty, people

> who have their own deep interests in their subjects. Their subjects are so important to them. The kids see someone really cares about things and ideas and projects. The children talk about the things the teachers are doing or planning or talking about. There is ort of a passion.... -- Joan Moon, Woodlands School parent

Parents are most satisfied if they believe, as did nearly every parent interviewed, that their child's particular teacher was competent academically and concerned enough about the child to provide extra assistance when necessary. Many parents realize that as the director hires teachers, it is currently a "buyers market" and the school is able to select excellent teachers. They also know that unsatisfactory teachers are not protected by tenure. They have confidence, therefore, that the teachers at their school are at least as qualified as public school teachers and perhaps better qualified because their training usually emphasized subject matter instead of education courses. Also, many parents are convinced that the caculty is excellent partly on the grounds that because nonpublic school salaries are relatively low (too low to live on), the teachers are motivated by their personal dedication to subject and students, not money.

Parents observe that the teachers assumemore responsibility for helping the individual child with his work. Parental feedback or communication typically reaches the teacher directly or through the director. They value the mark of individuality

and creativity teachers often bring to their classrooms. Both parents and teachers report the many advantages of the teachers' autonomy as he develops his own curriculum with some degree of the freedom of a university professor. Teachers as well as parents often initiate a joint effort to overcome particular weaknesses in a child's academic or social development. If parents do not generally believe the teachers at their nonpublic school to be generally superior to those in the public schools, they definitely believe that because the working conditions (class loads, little paper work, parental supprt, etc.) are superior in the independent school, teachers are therefore able to do a significantly better job.

C. THE STRENGTHS OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT

> We were attracted to Hillside's family involvement. Parents can stay in touch with the kids at least through the eighth grade. On the surface it looks like a very messy way to run an organization, messy like a democracy is messy.... But so much is accomplished in the process. -- Francis Andrews, Hillside School parent

> Our kids know how important we think school is...because they see us around there working. They know that we built the sandbox or painted the building and they watch us go to parent meetings....And most parents have some fun doing those things. -- Martin Springman, Bede School parent

> The children feel special on the days we all go to school as a family.... It's sort of a family school. -- Selma Springman, Bede School parent, referring to the one day a week she works in the school office

Significant involvement of parents in the academic, organizational, and maintenance affairs of the school, often side-by-side with school personnel, is considered valuable

by the parents for several reasons. The inclusion of parents as major actors in the organization keeps costs down. Also, of more importance to most parents is the belief that their regular participation greatly improves children's attitudes and relationships to teachers, learning and school in general. (The school director and faculty also hold this belief.)

Many parents also express pleasure in their own confidence that "being close to the school" and working there function to keep the family closer together by providing additional common ground for closer relationships as the children grow. Several parents consider school as perhaps the only organization or setting outside the home itself, and possibly the church, where both children and adults can associate. "Parents can stay in touch with the kids," said on parent, because parents are familiar with the children's school life and with the peopl with whom the children work and play at school. Strong interest in keeping family relationships close emerged as a norm held by most parents who were drawn to these particular "parent-active" schools.

D. PARENT POWER IN SCHOOL DECISION-MAKING

Parents referred to the public schools as "our schools" and to the nonpublic school they presently aptronized as "our" school, but the interviews indicate that many parents perceived their public schools as "theirs" in a somewhat

figurative sense. Their money, although automatically extracted through taxation, finances the public schools and periodically they can participatein school board and millage elections. But parents believe they have little or no influence oner the public schools, formally or informally. If anyone controlled the large public school systems, the professionals (the teachers and administrators) did and in a sense public schools were "theirs." As described earlier, parents felt alienated by the professionals and the bureaucracy.

In contrast, the parents believe the independent school is literally "ours". They chose the school, they personally present tuition and donations to the school, and they believe they can exercise power and influence to some degree in nearly every activity related to the school. Although it is policy that the curriculum is the inviolate domain of the directors and his faculty, parents do at times successfully agitate for changes. Although parents generally respect the teacher's domain (the curriculum), the director occasionally must fend off overzealous parents. When a parent disregards the norm of reasonable civility and critizes a teacher or a process too harshly, it is a common pattern that other parents join with the director to support the teacher. Nearly everything that happens must have popular

support from the parents.

Every parent is obligated to take at least a minimal role in the decision processes. Parents not only vote on most major decisions made at the school (such as hiring a new director) through the parent board or by way of referenda placed before the general membership, but they are always "in on" the development and design of alternatives from which choices must be finally made. Another factor augmenting parent power in the school is the availability of considerable information to interested parents in a small, cooperative school community. Whether one is a very active or moderately active parent in the school government and politics, most parents believe that they have power and satisfactory access to the school's decision-making processes.

E. A SENSE OF EXCITEMENT

> There was an excitement about their lives that seemed somehow connected to their school.... --Francis Adams, a Hillside parent describing a neighborhood family that first interested the Adams in Hillside school

The pride and element of excitement associated with "school" which comes across during most of the interviews with parents and in the notes afterward is unmistakable. The school buildings and facilities are not elaborate. In fact there is a modesty about the schools that distinguishes them from most neighboring public schools. But parents

believe their schools are more aesthetic educational environments than the public schools. With obvious pride they point out the rural, wooded grounds surrounding the school and the children's bold art work and varied projects that decorate the halls and rooms.

For many parents there is personal enjoyment in participation and association with others with whom they identify and share norms. They also enjoy believing they are providing "a good education" and a stimulating environment for their children. Another pleasure for parents is the sense of accomplishment that comes from helping run and constantly improve a complex small organization.

Parents believe that most children are very happy at school, a belief that pleases parents. One mother reported, "...one of my children used to cry nearly every Saturday morning because it wasn't a school day. Now that's got to say something about Bede and how we all feel about it." Several parents reported similar attachment to "school" in their children.

F. COSTS TO PARENTS FOR CHOOSING NONPUBLIC SCHOOLS

For many parents, tuition and other related financial costs accompanying the independent schools studied here are a burden, especially for those families with more than one

child enrolled. Ordinarily the parents are not wealthy. Although one or both parents are frequently employed as professionals, they are often still establishing their careers and are in the process of purchasing homes for frowing families. Private school costs are not insignificant to them.

Most parents say they would prefer to patronize satisfactory public schools. Therefore, there is a "cost" associated with not being able to accept the educational services (because the services are considered inadequate or inferior) provided by the public schools they are compelled to subsidize automatically. Also there is a fairly widespread discomfort among parents with being perceived by much of the general public as elitist.

There are other nonfinancial costs involved, too. Parental involvement requires considerable time and some inconvenience for extensive participation in school politics and projects, though parents complain relatively little. The mother often carries the day to day burden of transportation, arranging car pools when possible. Numerous students travel a fairly great distance to the school. Also, because their school life usually occurs outside their local neighborhood, the ties between the nonpublic school children and their neighborhood public school peers are often weak. Another cost is

having to accept less breadth in the total nonpublic school curriculum and relatively limited facilities (swimming pools, gymnasiums, extensive libraries, music rooms, and audio visual equipment, for example) than neighborhood public schools may have. Also, parents indicate that they often feel a sense of guilt and regret for not "supporting" public schools, although they also believe the schools do not provide the educational services they want for their children. Several parents reported being concerned enough about the "plight" of the inner city schools to spend time and energy regularly doing volunteer work in those schools and on parent committees which agitate the public school bureaucracy for positive changes in the public schools.

## VIII. CONCLUDING STATEMENTS

We have approached the question of consumer choice in an important public service from two angles. The first angle is essentially theoretical and deductive; the second is empirical and inductive. Both approaches indicate the need and demand for more parent and student choice in education.

More attention must be given to defining the policy roles not just of consumers, but also the educational professionals and elected officials at various levels of government. Special interests -- primarily the groups representing

the professionals in education -- dominate policy making. Both our theoretical and empirical studies provide evidence as to why this is so. However, our studies also indicate institutional reforms are needed which will redistribute policy-making and coordinative authority in a way which will improve the quality of education. Specifically, parents and students should be able to make choices in those aspects of schooling which are (1) private consumption and (2) local in their impact. The independent school study suggests that small, parent-active schools in which a sense of "community" can grow around personal relationships and shared norms, result in relatively greater satisfaction for its parents, educators, and students. Another important implication is that certain kinds of schools function well as autonomous units without any connection to a "downtown" school bureaucracy. Professionals should be systematically encouraged to be responsive to parent and student preferences, while at the same time they are allowed to provide guidance and innovations to improve education over the long run. Elected officials, particularly at the local level, are not able to provide the detailed direction needed for consumer satisfaction in a service such as education. They can, however, play an important role in providing general policy direction. At the national level, these general

policy directions will be heavily weighed with the public interest. We suggest that certain policies, such as integration or the setting of certain minimum standards of achievement, can only be set through national policy-making processes.

We suggest that research and experimentation be continued to more clearly specify the parameters within which each set of actors can make meaningful choices. At the present time, our system for delivery of educational services is poorly conceived, poorly coordinated and excessively costly. We must consciously work to integrate the contributions of each actor. Major reforms will be required in perceptions, governing and finance. We think, however, that the inefficiencies and inequities of the system as it is presently constituted are creating pressures which will not be tolerated much longer. Incremental reforms will not solve the problems of our metropolitan school systems. Therefore, we suggest that wide-ranging research on a variety of alternative (or perhaps radical) systems be encouraged, in the hopes of developing some new theories which will provide the framework around which our policy can be woven during the coming years. Without some new theory, we see little chance of breaking out of the impasse in which many of our major school systems now find themselves.